

**HELEN NGO'S TESTIMONY**  
CHAIRPERSON, COMMITTEE FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN VIETNAM  
8001 BRADLEY BLVD.  
BETHESDA, MD 20817

HEARING ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN VIETNAM  
THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS  
AND INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS  
June 20, 2005

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you very much for the opportunity to be here.

My name is Helen Ngo, and I am Chairwoman of the Committee for Religious Freedom in Vietnam, based in Bethesda, Maryland.

I will not discuss the overall condition of religious freedom in Vietnam. The fact that Vietnam is a country of particular concern speaks for itself. I will bring to your attention a number of typical cases which show that the situation has not improved despite Prime Minister Khai's promises to the US government.

Last month our committee brought to the attention of the Department of State the case of Pastor Than Van Truong of the Baptist General Conference house church organization. In 2003 when he attempted to visit his sick mother in the North, he was arrested for breaking the administrative detention order. He was subsequently sent to a mental hospital and was administered psychotic medications; the hospital's psychiatrist deemed that Pastor Truong's faith in God instead of Communism must be a symptom of insanity. I had hoped that Prime Minister Khai would set him free as a gesture of good will to President Bush. This did not happen.

The recently issued Ordinance on Belief and Religion and the Instructions on the implementation of this ordinance, which our Department of State praised as a major improvement, is actually a step backward. According to Fathers Nguyen Huu Giai and Phan Van Loi, whose written statements have been submitted to you, *"These two documents practically give the local authorities full control of all religious activities. Local government officials now can do whatever they want, causing uncountable obstacles to the appointment of clergy members, to the registration of seminarians, to the organization of religious activities, and to the demand for the return of confiscated church properties."* Both Catholic priests are under house arrest.

Bui Thien Hue, a Hoa Hao Buddhist deported from Cambodia with the acquiescence of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, reported that *"I, myself, was first put under house arrest for 24 months. My mother soon fell critically ill and I had to leave the house to take care of her. For this violation of 31/CP decree on administrative detention, I was given another 36-month sentence. My brother has been harassed by the local police."* He too is still under house arrest.

Pastor Pham Dinh Nhan, President of the Vietnam Evangelical Fellowship, himself denied household registration or citizenship identification for the past 30 years, has this to say about the situation in Vietnam after the US reached an agreement with Vietnam last month on religious freedom.

*“Recently, under the pressure from the international community, especially from the US Government, Prime Minister Phan Van Khai has issued Directives 01/2005, which create the conditions for Protestant churches to register their religious activities. However, there have been many signs showing that this document is aimed at dealing with the international community rather than reflecting a real change in policy, for the central government has played the role of being ignorant, letting local authorities continue to oppress Protestant groups... For the last few months, the government promised to the US that they would improve religious freedom. In reality, the situation is becoming worse... As a matter of fact, just this Sunday night, June 19th, 2005, there were 16 believers who were at Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang's house. The police came and ordered them to disperse; the police also filed a report on them.”*

There are more testimonies submitted to you from people in Vietnam. They are themselves victims of religious persecution and are in a better position than anyone of us, including our Department of State, to judge whether there the decrees, directives, instructions and promises issued by Prime Minister Khai are of any significance.

Mr. Chairman and Subcommittee members,

Collectively religious leaders and practitioners in Vietnam believe that the US should keep Vietnam as a Country of Particular Concern, closely monitor and report all incidents of religious violations and harassment, and use all means to pressure the Vietnamese government to:

- stop the use of torture in both its physical and psychiatric forms;
- repeal Decree 31/CP on administrative detention;
- return all confiscated church properties;
- release all pastors, missionaries, and lay leaders who are still detained;
- allow the Hoa Hao Buddhist Church to choose their own leaders;
- allow Hoa Hao Buddhists and House Church Christians to conduct religious activities at home;
- recognize those religious organizations which have operated legitimately at private houses and permit house churches to build or rent facilities for their religious activities;
- return to religious organizations places of worship that have been forced to be deserted or seized for other uses;
- prosecute all government officials who violate religious freedom; and
- create a special task force in the office of the Prime Minister to respond to complaints against local government officials who commit acts of religious persecution.

It is 2AM in Vietnam now, but many religious leaders and believers are praying for the success of this hearing.

Once again thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to be a voice for those who cannot be here today.

Helen Ngo